

**Remarks by Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia
for Subcommittee Hearing on Palestinian Elections and Assistance
March 8, 2006**

Hamas' recent victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections poses a significant setback to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and U.S. interests in stabilizing the region.

As such, U.S. policy and assistance programs relating to the Palestinian Authority must be modified to address this development and conform to our post-9/11 doctrine regarding groups such as Hamas.

In the past decade, millions of U.S. tax dollars were spent to help Abu Mazen to eradicate terror and promote accountability and transparency of government institutions.

Despite U.S. and international efforts, Abu Mazen and a corrupt PLO and Fatah party were unable or, rather, unwilling to comply with their obligations under numerous agreements, including under the Roadmap, and to undertake the necessary steps toward peace and security.

Ultimately, inaction and the decision to allow Hamas to participate in the elections without putting down their weapons, legitimized Hamas as a political entity and contributed to the situation we face now.

Soon after the Palestinian elections, Hamas placed disturbing videos on its official website glorifying bloodshed and terror.

One of the clips portrays a farewell scene between a mother and her terrorist son as she helps dress him for his suicide mission.

Another clip has a terrorist expressing his message to the Jews.

“My message to the loathed Jews is that there is no God but Allah, we will chase you everywhere! We are a nation that drinks blood, and we know that there is no blood better than the blood of the Jews. We will not leave you alone until we have quenched our thirst with your blood, and our children's thirst with your blood. We will not leave until you leave the Muslim countries.”

These are not words of a tolerant and democratic political entity.

Rather, these words reflect an official policy of a terrorist organization that now has control over the Palestinian parliament.

Our response must be clear and resolute.

We must ensure that U.S. tax dollars will not be used directly or indirectly to subsidize a government controlled by an Islamist jihadist organization responsible for brutally killing and injuring innocent civilians.

My colleagues and I, who introduced the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006, believe that this should include cutting off non-humanitarian aid to the PA, until the new Palestinian governing entity renounce terrorism, disarms, recognizes Israel and commits itself to all previous agreements.

It also cannot be limited exclusively to Hamas but must necessarily apply to all Islamist terrorist groups operating in areas under PA control.

In the weeks following the Hamas victory, Palestinian terrorist groups have launched over 130 Qassam rockets into Israeli territory—a 20% increase from the rockets fired at Israel last year.

Islamic Jihad and Fatah-affiliated groups have claimed responsibility for the attacks.

It is therefore foolish to believe that Fatah will provide a valid alternative to Hamas.

There are nuances in approach with respect to the provision of assistance for civil society and democracy promotion.

We have received input from some who argue that it is important to support non-Hamas political parties, promote independent media efforts, and to preserve the integrity of the Palestinian elections commission, as a counter to Hamas' efforts.

However, Congress remains concerned.

Based on recent experience, it would appear that, overall, civil society programs in the territories have failed in their mission of creating an open, transparent, tolerant, and democratic form of government.

Our witnesses today will address these and other issues relating to international assistance programs and factors that could alter how funding is assessed.

Also, we hope to extrapolate lessons from the experiences of our allies.

In doing so, we have invited Ms. Ilka Schroeder to testify on her extensive study of the EU's assistance programs within the Palestinian territories.

In addressing the issue of assistance; the next steps for the international community and for U.S. policy—both bilaterally and through international forums-- it is

incumbent upon us to exert due diligence over how U.S. contributions to the United Nations, for example, are being used.

One organization in particular that is of concern is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

UNRWA has proven to be ineffective in preventing assistance from reaching the hands of Jihadists, in ensuring its facilities are not used for Islamist terrorist efforts, and has been incapable of curbing incitement to violence and anti-Israel sentiment within the territories.

We look forward to hearing the views of our panelists on the implications of Hamas' electoral victory and hope to gain a better understanding of what type of safeguards can be put in place to prevent U.S. assistance from being manipulated by terrorists like Hamas.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize that this Subcommittee has held numerous hearing and briefings on U.S. policy and U.S. assistance to the Palestinians.

We have received a range of differing views and have heard from the Administration, from NGOs, and other experts.

Today's hearing is a continuation of those efforts and complements the hearing held by the Full International Relations Committee last week.